

The Ballarat Naturalist

JUNE 2015



Travelling in Mongolia

by Val Hocking

I was privileged to take a tour in June 2014, travelling on the Trans Mongolian Railway from Beijing to Moscow which included nearly a week in Mongolia.

We were taken by bus from Mongolia's capital, Ulaan Bataar into rural areas, visiting places of historic interest, observing the life of the Nomads and visiting Hustai Naruu National Park.

At night we stayed in Ger Camps, sleeping in Ger tents but with the comforts of a caravan park. A highlight was visiting a nomadic family and the opportunity of learning about their lifestyle. This family had a herd of around 1000 sheep and goats, quite a number of horses and a couple of camels. Their domed tent is lined with insulating wool-felt and has colourful rugs decorating the walls.

As there are almost no trees on the Steppe, dried animal manure is the source of fuel. Meat and milk products constitute the main diet. The people move camp to appropriate locations four times a year with the seasons. This would probably be done by putting the packed-up Ger tent and all belongings on the back of a ute truck. In the past camels or yaks would have been used.

Another highlight was visiting Hustai National Park where we observed the Przewalski wild horses known as Takhi in Mongolia – the ancestor of the domestic horse.



Photo: Takhi - wild horse

These horses had died out in Mongolia by 1968, due mainly to hunting, being seen as a threat to the much-valued domestic horse. In the 1980's a captive breeding program using horses that had been housed in zoos around the world since 1900 was undertaken, with the goal of reintroducing them to

their original land- the steppes of Central Asia. Between 1992 and 2000, 84 takhi were transported to Hustai NP. They were placed in large enclosures initially, being carefully monitored regarding their adaption to this new environment. They are coping well and by 2010 they numbered around 200. (A group of 350 is needed to be considered a viable population.)

The Takhi are genetically different to horses in that they have 66 chromosomes where horses have 64. However they can interbreed with horses. They are more like Zebras in appearance with a short mane and no forelock. Their thick shaggy woollen coat in the winter is needed for the harsh climate. Takhi are very social animals, grazing in herds of a lead stallion, mares and foals. Other stallions live separately. In summer they graze in the breeze on hilltops to reduce exposure to insect bites and heat, but come down late afternoon to the valleys to drink. Wolves are their worst enemies.

Other fauna that we saw during our travels were lots of rodents- the small Sousliks which live in burrows and stand on their hind legs to scan for enemies. Their larger counterparts, the Siberian Marmots had been, until recently, hunted for their fur but now are protected. While travelling I saw a number of pairs of Damoiselle cranes with chicks, similar to our brolgas and on one occasion a large group of Eurasian Black Vultures.

Our most interesting Mongolia trip ended all too soon and it was time to board the train for our next stop in Siberia, Russia.

Cairns to Cape York by John Gregurke

On a bus trip from Cairns to Cape York in 2013 John and Elaine Gregurke visited Cooper Creek Wilderness, a privately owned, 67-hectare block of rainforest. This block is in the Daintree Cape Tribulation section of the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area. The ecology of the area, including a rich diversity of plants was explained to them. Many of the plants depend on the animals living in the rainforest.



The Cassowary Plum has plum-sized fruits with a smooth, bright blue-coloured

Photo: Fan Palms, Coopers Creek Wilderness

skin. The fruits contain a sap which is poisonous to humans and to most animals. However, the Southern Cassowary is able to eat the toxic fruit because the stomach of the Cassowary has digestive enzymes which breakdown the toxins. The Cassowary can then spread the seeds around the rainforest.



An unusual plant they found growing near a creek was Fungus Root *Balanophora fungosa*. Although similar in body shape to the Pretty-mouth fungus *Calostoma spp.* it is actually a flowering plant and a root parasite.

Photo: Fungus Root *Balanophora fungosa*

Black Sheoak *Allocasuarina littoralis* was seen in a heathland area within 100km of the tip of Cape York. John was surprised to see the plant so far north. Further checking shows the plant has a distribution from Cape York to Tasmania, where it was seen during ANN 2014 Get-together.

Fungi excursion Sun 7 June at Garden St Erth, Blackwood

Exc. leaves usual departure point at 9.30, or at car park at Garden St Erth at 10.30 or meet at lunchtime about 12.30 to 1.30. Bring mirrors and cameras.

Mt Cole Excursion

On Saturday 2 May the weather looked threatening in Ballarat with low cloud and drizzle. By the time 10 people gathered in Beaufort the cloud had lifted and by the afternoon the sun was shining.

We travelled up the Main Mt Cole Road, stopping soon after entering the forest, to look at the large area that has been invaded with agapanthus. It is the largest patch I have seen in a bushland area. At the junction of Main Mt Cole Road and Camp Road we inspected Mount Cole Grevillea *Grevillea montis cole* growing along a graded road edge. In this wet area the forest of Eurabbie *Eucalyptus globulus bicostata* and Messmate *E. obliqua* is tall and straight. Sweet Bursaria *Bursaria spinosa* was a common shrub and Cut-leaf Daisy *Brachyscome multifida* crept through the grasses.

By the side of Camp Rd. we had morning tea and were entertained by a male Flame Robin flying around the hut. Les found a red fungus, the Rhubarb Bolete *Boletellus obscurecoccineus*.

Back on the main road we parked and walked to Grevillea Lookout on the edge of an escarpment. To the west we could see Langi Ghiran and the Chalicum Hills wind farm. Among the granite rocks were more Grevillea, Penny-leaf Flat-pea *Platylobium rotundum*, Hop-bush *Dodonea viscosa* and Dusty Miller *Spyridium parvifolium*. Peter Muller identified several species of ants – most were Jack Jumpers. (Peter will have interesting information about ants for us at the Club meeting and excursion in February 2016.)



Photo: Rhubarb Bolete *Boletellus obscurecoccineus*

Lunch was at Victoria after logging in the late 1800's. There were several ferns growing along the creek including Soft Tree Fern *Dicksonia antarctica* and Bracken Fern *Pteridium esculentum*.

We spent the afternoon on the NW side of Mt Cole State Forest. The vegetation changes as the rainfall decreases and the geology changes from granite to Ordovician sedimentary rock. The main trees are Red Stringybark *E. macrorryncha*, Long-leaf Box *E. goniocalyx* and Yellow Box *E. melliodora*. Cranberry Heath *Astroloma humifusum* and Clustered Everlasting *Chrysocephalum semipapposum* were flowering. At the Mt Cole Cemetery Tall Greenhoods were in bud.

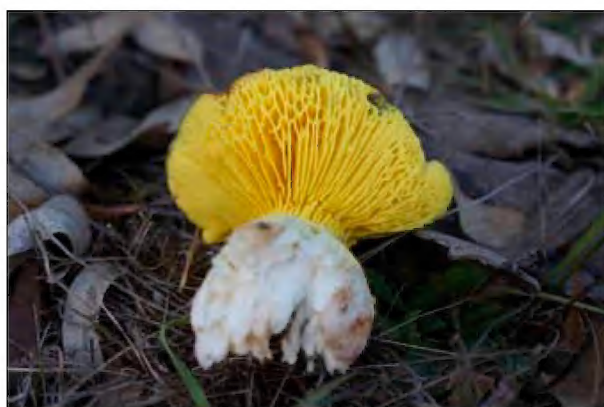


Photo: Gilled Bolete *Phylloporus sp*

The return journey was through Warrick and on to the Western Highway at Buangor. While we were enjoying afternoon tea and watching earthmoving machine working on the new highway Les found another fungus. This was the Gilled Bolete *Phylloporus sp.* a large fungus with yellow gills which stained blue when rubbed. Travelling into

Beaufort we saw the new highway duplication which has required the clearing of many old Red Gums and other trees as explained by a representative of the Western Highway Action Movement (WHAM) at the Club meeting on the previous night.

John Gregurke

Spreading the news about Ballarat Field Naturalist Club

Breaze donated the Club a stall at Living Market at Lake Wendouree on Saturday 23 May.

John Gregurke organised the setting up of the stall and a roster of members to attend the stall with him for the morning. Various members contributed displays. A few people stopped for a chat and 15 copies of the syllabus were given out.

Thanks to John and his helpers on the day.

Excerpts from FNCB Meeting Minutes, May

Opening and Apologies

Attendance: Acting Pres., Fran Hanrahan, welcomed 24 members, a visitor, M Mackenzie. Apologies: Elders, Dalmans, Thurgoods, B Murphy, P Noble, D Menon, D Brooke, J Morrish, J Metcalf.

Correspondence: IN

From Environment Victoria: Green Action News, Master Climate Petition; call to switch to Powershop, a 100% renewable energy provider supporting the Renewable Energy Target; political flyer.

From John Petheram, Club Member: thanks to all members who attended the planning day at La Gerche Trail for their much-valued input into the grant project; From Ken Stepnel, Warrnambool Field Naturalists' Club: Request that he and some other Club members visit Lilwarre to photograph orchids every few months after they read the story of Heather Cameron's visit during the SEANA Camp.

From Chris Johnston, Friends of Muckleford Forest (Green Gully): copy of extensive letter sent to the State Environment Minister re. planned burns scheduled for Muckleford Forest Reserves.

From the Office of the Inspector General Emergency Management: Email informing us that the Inspector General, Tony Pearce, has finished and submitted his review of the State's approach to fuel management to the State Government for consideration.

OUT:

Request that members start thinking about any information/ photos/ newspaper articles/ syllabuses/ letters/ anecdotes, etc. that they might be able to contribute to the telling of the Club's history in Susan Kruss's master's thesis.

To Deirdre Murphy, Waterwatch Coordinator, CCMA: request for support and staff presence to guide us through a Waterbug Survey on our October field trip to Lilwarre.

Business Arising from Correspondence:

Lichen brochures available tonight to purchase for \$3. See Les H. after the meeting. They proved to be very popular.

Reports: Western Highway Duplication Project: Mairi Anne Mackenzie, a member of WHAM and WHERE (Western Hwy Environmental Rescue Effort) gave us a compelling and sobering update about the Western Hwy Duplication Project from Beaufort to Ararat, detailing environmental losses/ consequences so far, and those likely to occur over the next stages of the project without some large-scale re-engineering/ re-consideration of plans by the Roads Minister and Vic Roads, which is what WHAM and WHERE hope to successfully lobby for. More information and photos available on the Facebook pages of these two groups.

Treasurer's Report: Opening bal. \$14,786.62 Inc. \$632.49

Exp. \$683.39 Closing bal. \$14735.72

La Gerche Trail project: John Petheram updated the members on the excellent progress of the project, with 30 large tree labels finalised and ordered, 31 small tree labels close to being finalised, and the wording of 13 interpretative signs virtually finished from our Club's perspective and now with Parks Victoria to clarify one or two facts and organise complementary images drawings to be included on them.

General Business

Vale John Williams past Club Member John died on Thursday 23rd April in UK. Our thoughts are with Alison and her family.

Also a long SEANA Camp feedback: article in latest FNCV newsletter remarks "a very enjoyable weekend with wonderful input from our local guides". – Joan Broadberry. There is article on Heather Cameron's experiences of the SEANA Camp in the Warrnambool FNC Newsletter, April 2015, available online.

Peter and Claire send their regards to everyone from Amsterdam.

Show and Tell

Peter Muller sadly described finding an electrocuted Antechinus in his toaster at Enfield.

Crimson Rosellas are enjoying the apples in Margaret Thomas's

front garden at Nerrina.

Jane Marriott spotted a pair of Wedge-tailed Eagles flying over Main St in Creswick – they have been regulars for months, apparently. Jane also had the good fortune to see a beautiful, large Wanderer Butterfly in her Creswick veggie patch, feeding from the basil flowers along with about 10 other insect species.

Andy Arnold noted extensive wind damage to trees in the Upper Loddon (Box) Forest, presumably by the same wind-storm that caused substantial damage to many mature trees along the Midland Hwy between Eganstown and Daylesford in early March.

Emily Noble reported two sightings of a male Red-headed Mouse Spider probably wandering around looking for a mate (which can be 3 or 4 times the size of the male) on her block in Scarsdale. Apparently their bite can be very painful but not deadly, which isn't surprising when you see the size of their fangs. She also talked of a very small plant she found in Dereel in October 2014 that has just been identified by Neville Walsh from the Herbarium. It is a Pygmy Clubmoss *Phylloglossum drummondii*, never recorded in Dereel before, and not recorded anywhere in Victoria since 1983.

John Gregurke observed about 30 Red-necked Stints at Lake Burumbeet on 23rd April, about one quarter of them developing breeding plumage, red under chin and on their back. He also saw his first Little Eagle and Flame Robin for the season at Racecourse Point.

Something for ALL members

July meeting : *Understanding our Natural World*

Come to the meeting with a few sentences about a time when

- * *action*
- * *idea or*
- * *fact*

about nature gave you a new understanding about an aspect of the natural world.

You may wish to bring an object or picture to assist you.

CALENDAR 2015-16

June

- Fri 5 *Conservation & farming* - Neville Oddie, Farmer and
Conservationist, Chepstowe
- Sun 7 Exc: *Fungi* (See p. 3) - L Hanrahan, Club member
- Tues 26 No committee meeting this month

July

- Fri 3 *Understanding our natural World* - Club members
- Sun 5 Excursion: *Winter-flowering orchids, Dereel* - Emily Noble,
Club Member

Committee

President	Peter Dalman
Vice –Pres	Fran Hanrahan
Secretary	Emily Noble
Treasurer	Les Hanrahan

Claire Dalman
John Gregurke
Wayne McGuire

Val Hocking
John Mildren

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Meetings are held at the Primary Industries Training Centre, cnr of Gillies and Gregory Sts, on the first Friday of the month at 7.30pm..

Excursions: Leave from the carpark at the Primary Industries Training Centre, cnr Gillies and Gregory Sts. at 9.30 am, unless otherwise advised.

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